INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Kentucky Virtual University, Lexington Public Library (LPL) conducted a series of three focus groups on November 29, November 30 and December 6, 2000.

The focus groups were designed to gather input on the Virtual Library's database collection. A total of 23 participants, drawn from a cross-section of the community, attended the focus groups. Several invitees who had committed to participate were not able to attend, due to the impact of the holidays, school and other responsibilities.

Penny Reeves, Executive Director of the LPL Foundation, facilitated the focus groups. Ms. Reeves has worked with the LPL Reference Department to raise funds for LPL's database collection. Ida Cornett, member of the Collection Development Committee of KYVL and manager of the Central Library's Reference Department, organized the series. Electronic Resources Librarian Heather Wingfield was on hand to answer technical questions. Ms. Cornett, Ms. Wingfield, and Reference Librarian, Wendy Miller were the recorders.

Participants were recruited from the general public: a distance learning student and educator were present, as well as college and high school students, parents, teachers, retirees, an archaeologist and an entrepreneur. Medical, law, public, and college librarians were also present. Some attendees had used the KYVL databases, others had not. Personal interests ran from book groups to arts and culture, from health care to investment clubs.

In spite of preparation i.e., handouts from KYVL and KYVU, and verbal instructions, there was initial confusion about KYVL databases versus LPL databases. In the first group, the facilitator clarified the differences; in the two other groups, additional materials were prepared and distributed to avoid confusion.

This report will present its findings in the following order: first, a summary of the key findings from all three groups, then summaries from individual groups and finally, appendices containing the notes and edited texts of each session.

KYVL FOCUS GROUPS
GROUP 1 SUMMARY
NOVEMBER 29, 2000
11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

A majority of the participants had had some exposure to KYVL. There were college students, a law and a medical librarian, a public librarian, an entrepreneur, and two parents of school age children.

The primary motivations for using KYVL were serving library patrons (including doctors and lawyers), doing academic research and assisting young students.

Specifically, participants liked the space-saving aspect of the databases, the timeliness of the material, the 24-hour remote access, and the depth of information.

Favorite databases included Novelist, Medline (full text), ArticleFirst, Contents 1st, Proceedings 1st, WorldCat, Books in Print with Reviews, OCLC, ERIC and PsycINFO. In general, everything in full text was preferred.

There was some initial confusion about the difference between the KYVL and the LPL databases; during this conversation, INFOTRAC and a locally-generated information and referral database called INFORM were mentioned.

When asked what was most helpful about the databases, access to full text articles was mentioned more than once. In addition, participants appreciated email because it saves both time and money in document delivery.

Some frustrations involved navigation e.g., passwords; figuring out how to search; the relative difficulty for novices in learning to use the databases. Other frustrations were "content-based" e.g., Medline (full text) is not solely American, and many doctors want only the work of their peers in the U.S.; there's a need for more on alternative medicine; the focus should be broader than academic.

For clarity, the suggested subjects and/or databases for KYVL to consider are given in the following simple list: More legal databases if available and affordable – Lexis and Westlaw; case law information, especially prior to 1993; services like Dun & Bradstreet for people starting a business; people finders/city directories**; would like**

telnet or other dial-up applications for people who can't afford or don't want to pay for Internet and fancy graphics; Kentucky Revised Statutes; MDConsult; Gale Health and Wellness Center's alternative health module; AP format examples for people writing papers (style guides); local doctor referral; large print for seniors; investment; patents; INFOTRAC.

One participant's comment summed up the positive feelings about KYVL: " It's important that people know that this is a great use of their tax dollars. That would be meaningful to people."

Why are you here, what do you do, do you use databases?

Cataloger and works with 6th graders, advanced readers. Uses Novelist to find appropriate books for kids.

Works in Technical Services; new to KYVL; finds databases are beneficial to her high-school son; is impressed by quantity of information and by Novelist.

Sole librarian for 4 law offices; uses databases when needing to go beyond Lexus/Westlaw; serves attorneys, their spouses and children, and friends of attorneys.

Graduate Student in English at UK, cataloger at BWI and reference librarian uses databases for study research and in library work. Interested in KYVL as both student and librarian.

Medical librarian at a hospital; uses databases all day, every day; the user population is the 2,000 hospital employees and their families.

Has had interest in alternative medicine and alternative research in health care for 10-15 years; working on master's degree in natural health; will open own business; has had trouble finding information independently on Internet and has found that specialists e.g., librarians are better at finding information than are teachers

Have you used the KYVL databases? Why or why not?

(There was some initial confusion about the differences between KYVL and the LPL databases, which Penny and Ida clarified)

Databases have helped make information gathering quicker and more effective. Replaced aisles and aisles of print indexes. Still refers to paper for earlier, esp. pre-1980 information.

Finds clients sometimes find dbases threatening because there are so many choices.

Likes the timeliness and effectiveness of dbase research. Great for quick background checks of the literature. Would be nice if they went back further.

Did training for staff for 6 months and trained many, many people. Uses KYVL databases the most of all the dbases he has available. Clientele includes many college students.

Constantly looking for links between conventional and alternative medicine. Thinks links to local practitioners should be included. Doesn't want to deal with the hassle of coming downtown and parking.

Wasn't aware of that dbases were available by remote access [outside of PL] until recently. Had been using in PL only. Now doesn't have to leave office, and can stay at desk all day, every day if needed.

Didn't know about KYVL dbases until someone told her about them.

Dbases have eliminated the need to take a road trip to the library.

It's a "one-stop shop."

You can timely information.

The information is in-depth.

I would use it more if there were patent information.

I can do research any time of day.

I can work without leaving office

It eliminates the need to go to Young Library for Medline/Article First

I like OCLC access.

Which databases do you use most frequently?

Medline

The full-text databases; searches all FT all at once.

WorldCat

Article1st

Contents1st

Proceedings1st

The full-text databases, because they reduce the delivery time in getting information to clients

Uses BIP for reviews.

ERIC, which used to be accessible only at the Education Library at UK that has limited hours.

PsycINFO

What has been particularly helpful about the databases?

Full-text

As a researcher, FT can sometimes eliminate need for ILL, and it reduces delivery time.

If search is crafted correctly can get almost all info with one search.

E-mail- can e-mail things to clients, to home computers, saves time and money.

ERIC had only been available at the Education library, which has limited hours; nice to have available all the time.

It's very easy to use for training purposes.

What has been particularly frustrating about the databases?

Need more about alternative medicine.

VL set up for children, people in school and college.

Sometimes not as easy to search as other databases, like Infotrac.

Some people find it difficult if they're not used to Boolean logic.

Passwords are problematic. If they could be eliminated it would open up the VL to more people.

Many people aren't that comfortable with searching and get frustrated when they don't get the right results.

For people who aren't comfortable with computers searching is a problem.

Needs to be streamlined.

It takes a lot of help to learn to use.

It would be nice if everything could be searched the same way.

The databases have helped with info mining, but not with delivery; the information is there, but you have to figure out where to start.

Lots of people with a partial secondary education or going back to school after many years away never did research. They are overwhelmed and need assistance. The services are great, but only become valuable after they figure out how to research.

One complaint about Medline full-text--it is not *American* full-text. Most hospital staff would prefer American. Therapies are different. Many health professionals skeptical of research done in other countries.

Should provide more on the type of information contained in each category of database.

Not as familiar to some public library users as the Gale products

Require lots of practice.

Hard for novices to understand when they don't get hits.
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Need to standardize searching across databases.

Part of user frustration comes from the myth that you can find anything on a computer

The audience is highly specific.

The databases can be overwhelming for someone educated 20 years ago, or for someone who has been away from education; these people need to re-learn research skills applicable to the databases.

Expertise requires experience.

What subject areas would you like to see covered in KYVL databases, and which specific databases should be added? [Also concluding remarks]

More legal databases if available and affordable – Lexis and Westlaw.

Case law information, especially prior to 1993.

Also D &B and services like that for people who are starting a business.

People finders/city directories.

Would also like telnet or other dial-up applications for people who can't afford or don't want to pay for Internet and fancy graphics.

The Kentucky Revised Statutes

Law and business

The medical librarians in the Bluegrass would like MDConsult.

Gale information products, as these are easier to search sometimes.

[Gale] Health and Wellness Center has an alternative health module.

People need help writing papers in AP format examples instead of spending $40 for a book.

Kids in college want examples for research papers [Style guides?]

Need local area information, like doctor referral.

Large print for seniors.

Investment.

Patents.

Alternative medicine.

Gale databases, particularly InfoTrac.

" It's important that people know that this is a great use of their tax dollars. That would be meaningful to people."